

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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Testimony on  
Oversight Hearing on  
the implications to public domain national forest should a bill to require the appointment of the Chief of the Forest Service by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate

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Before the

House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

September 16, 1997

Madam Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the views of the Administration regarding the appointment of the Chief of the Forest Service by the President, by and with the consent of the Senate. The Secretary is still reviewing this proposal and has not come to a conclusion at this time.

The Chief of the Forest Service is responsible for administering nearly 192 million acres of lands in 44 States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. In addition, the Chief of the Forest Service is responsible for research programs, cooperative programs in state and private forestry and international forestry. The Chief supervises an agency of nearly 35,000 people with an annual budget of approximately \$3 billion in appropriated funds. Let me describe a few pros and cons for each side of the proposal.

The tradition of appointing career professionals with experience in the Forest Service has served the agency for nearly a century. This is a tradition that the Administration has maintained. The former Chief, Jack Ward Thomas, appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture in 1993 at the request of President Clinton, attained the highest rank in Forest Service research following 25 years of service to the agency. Similarly, the current Chief, Mike Dombeck, served the Forest Service for 12 years before holding senior resource management positions with the Bureau of Land Management.

Promoting Chiefs from within the agency also provides continuity to the Forest Service. The Forest Service manages some ancient forests that are older than the Constitution itself. Due to the long-term nature of managing forest and rangeland ecosystems for sustainability, it is important to develop and promote leadership that is sensitive to the agency's mission and reflects the long-term responsibilities of public land conservation.

Finally, Congress provides oversight for the activities and priorities of the Forest Service through the appropriations process and authorizing committees. The Forest Service has appeared before Congress more than 50 times during this year alone. One could argue that Congress already has an effective and active role in the oversight of the Forest Service leadership which has been practiced during the tenure of fourteen Chiefs of the Forest Service.

On the other hand, the Forest Service is one of the largest agencies in the Federal government that is managed by a professional that does not have Senate consent. In fact, very similar land management agencies in the Department of the Interior such as the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management all have leadership that comes before the Senate for consent. In this regard., an active role for Congress in reviewing the President's appointment for the Forest Service is apt.

In addition, from the Administration's perspective, the President could potentially demand greater accountability from a Chief of the Forest Service that has a more defined political role. The Forest Service is and will continue to be an agency that generates significant public interest as it sets priorities and manages 192 million acres of public land. A Chief that serves at the pleasure of the President in a more political position would more likely be responsive to specific values and objectives of the President.

And finally, if we were to break the tradition of appointing career professionals from within the agency, we would open ourselves up to a much broader array of candidates for this important job. The agency could be well-served by leadership that respects the important responsibilities of the Chief of the Forest Service, but also brings a fresh perspective from outside the agency.

In summary, the Administration is evaluating your proposal from a management perspective, in a historical light, and in regards to constitutional rights and responsibilities. I am happy to answer questions at this time.

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